

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

November 28, 2023

The Honorable Frank Kendall
Secretary of the Air Force
Department of the Air Force
1670 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, DC 20330-1670

Dear Secretary Kendall,

I write to express grave concern regarding brazen partisan comments made by the command at Minot Air Force Base (AFB) in North Dakota. As reported by American Military News, the leadership at Minot AFB sent a series of messages to service members to warn them of the dangers of being at or near a downtown rally that featured a speaker from Turning Point Action, which leadership claimed was an “alt-right organization.”¹

You are obligated to intervene, as this series of actions demonstrates a clear misapplication of the Hatch Act, which states members on active duty should not engage in political activities **while in uniform** to avoid creating the appearance that their political activities imply official Department of Defense (DoD) sponsorship, approval or endorsement of a candidate, campaign or cause.² The Dakota Patriot Rally in Minot, North Dakota, on November 17, 2023, took place after work hours and, to my knowledge, not on federal property; thus, the text messages and emails from command show a growing politicization at installations within the Department of the Air Force (DAF), favoring one political party or political view.

Before the Dakota Patriot Rally, members of the 5th Bomb Wing, the 91st Missile Wing, and other Air Force (AF) units were contacted via text message and Facebook cautioning them to stay away from the event. In this warning were threats against their careers and livelihood if they exercised their constitutionally protected freedom of speech and assembly under the Constitution of the United States. The contents of the message can be found below:³

From MDC chat last night-
"Leaders, please exercise caution if downtown this weekend. I've included a text from the 5SFS/CCF. Please pass along to your team and ask them to be careful and reach out for any concerns.

We just got word of an event going at the fairgrounds downtown, called Dakota Patriot Rally. Its guest speaker is from an alt-right organization called Turning Point Action. Please advise your folks that if they are going to be

downtown this weekend, it's good to be cautious, as the crowds this event may attract could be confrontational to military members. Additionally please remind them that participation with groups such as Turning Point Action could jeopardize their continued service in the US military."

There was a shooting incident yesterday in Minot, unclear if it was related

This text message was sent to personnel at Minot Air Force Base, North Dakota.

This text message was sent to personnel at Minot Air Force Base, North Dakota. (Air Force amn/nco/snco / Facebook)

Our service members are intimately familiar with their responsibility to remain impartial while representing their branch of service or while wearing the uniform. However, this political sidelining and threat of punitive action against one half of the political spectrum goes contrary to any DoD policy. Air Force Instruction 51-508, section 2.3,⁴ pursuant to DoD Directive 1344.10 clearly defines their permitted activities while in the DAF:

¹ [Air Force warns troops to avoid pro-Trump 'patriot' rally: Report \(americanmilitarynews.com\)](#)

² [Know before you post: politics in the service > Joint Base Langley-Eustis > Article Display \(af.mil\)](#)

³ [Fox News, "Air Force base warns service members to avoid 'patriot' rally with speaker from pro-Trump group," 21 Nov 2023.](#)

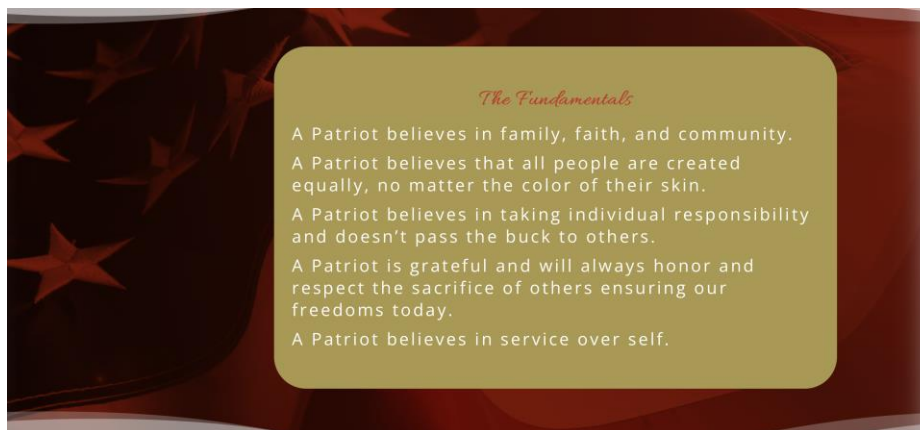
⁴ [AFI 51-508, POLITICAL ACTIVITIES, FREE SPEECH AND FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY OF AIR FORCE PERSONNEL, 12 Oct 2018.](#)

2.3. Permitted Activities. *In accordance with DoDD 1344.10, AF members may:*

2.3.3. *Join a partisan or nonpartisan political club and attend its meetings when not in uniform, but not in any official capacity nor listed as a sponsor (see restrictions in paragraph 2.4). (T- 0). The restriction on wearing the uniform to meetings also applies to retired and Reserve Component members. (T-0).*

2.3.4. *Attend partisan and nonpartisan political fundraising activities, meetings, rallies, debates, conventions, or activities as a spectator when not in uniform and when no inference or appearance of official sponsorship, approval, or endorsement can reasonably be drawn. (T- 0).*

As the event's own 'fundamentals' described on its website (below) do not appear to be controversial in the slightest,⁵ it seems exception was taken regarding the keynote speaker of the evening, Mr. Tyler Bowyer, Chief Operating Officer of Turning Point Action (TPA), a 501(c)4 non-profit organization. TPA is one of the largest conservative grassroots organizations in the nation, providing resources to Americans interested in getting involved in the political process.⁶



In light of the DAF's concerning trend away from established DoD policy and toward political bias that infringes on the constitutional rights of service members, please provide me responses to the following no later than December 7, 2023, and ensure the implicated parties are available to discuss these occurrences with the House Armed Services Committee at the earliest possible availability:

1. Who, specifically, at Minot AFB or elsewhere approved or issued these messages to the base's service members? I formally request the name, rank, and duty station for anyone connected to these messages.
2. What specific policies within the DAF forbid participation or assembly in political causes while off duty and while not representing the service?
3. What was the reasoning for determining participation in the Dakota Patriot Rally could jeopardize a service member's continued service in the U.S. military, and who made this determination?
4. What specific actions will the DAF take to ensure service members' constitutional rights are not violated in the future?

Sincerely,

Matt Gaetz
Member of Congress

⁵ [Dakota Patriot Rally Fundamentals](#)

⁶ [About -- Turning Point Action](#)